



Broadcast Transcript

Broadcast: It Ain't Over Till It's Over – Part 1

Guest(s): Dr. R.T. Kendall

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- Dr. Dobson: Welcome everyone to Family Talk. It's the ministry of the James Dobson Family Institute supported by listeners just like you. I'm Dr. James Dobson, and I'm thrilled that you've joined us.
- Roger Marsh: When we get to heaven we long to hear our savior say, "Well done good and faithful servant." How do we know that we've lived a life glorifying God until our last breath? Well, today's broadcast we'll focus on this idea of finishing well through a classic Family Talk interview. In just a moment you'll hear Dr. Dobson's insightful conversation with his dear friend, R.T. Kendall. He's a noted evangelist, teacher and best-selling author, Dr. Kendall also formerly served as senior minister at Westminster Chapel in London, England for 25 years. On that occasion, Dr. Kendall and Dr. Dobson broke down the idea of perseverance in the Christian life. What does it look like to not give up and to finish out our journey here on this earth? Well, we hope to address that critical question today, so let's get started. Here now is Dr. Dobson to further introduce his guest on this edition of Family Talk.
- Dr. Dobson: Today, it's me and a guest, a guest that I love like a brother, and that's not an overstatement. That comes from my heart. He's Dr. R.T. Kendall, and he's been on the program many times. Those who have been listening to us for years will recognize his voice and remember the programs that he's done. One of them was called Total Forgiveness, which came from his book by that name, and Total Forgiveness, as an interview, was the number one program of that year in terms of phone calls and letters in response to the public. Dr. Kendall is a great friend of mine and a great guest. R.T., it is really good to have you here.
- Dr. R.T. Kendall: I'm so honored. I can't tell you what you mean to me. It's because of you, that that book, *Total Forgiveness* is now in 20 languages.
- Dr. Dobson: Is it really?
- Dr. R.T. Kendall: Including Japanese, Chinese. I'm amazed. I was just saying to members of your staff a couple of minutes ago, I can look at you in the eye and tell you that I've prayed for you every day for 23 years.

Dr. Dobson: R.T., I-

Dr. R.T. Kendall: I've kept it up.

Dr. Dobson: If you say that, I believe it. Is that really the truth?

Dr. R.T. Kendall: Yes. You're not the only one. I don't always tell it, but for some reason I've told you, I hope I don't lose my reward in heaven, by letting you know. You're not only special to me, you're special to the world, to the church, and people need to pray for you. For your good health, clear mind, longevity, and may your ministry go on and on.

Dr. Dobson: The Lord has been good to both of us. To be working at this stage of our lives, working this hard, you don't look like you're 80, R.T., and you are speaking all over the place. I mean, you're working harder now, I think, than you ever did. Is that correct?

Dr. R.T. Kendall: It's true.

Dr. Dobson: You're still writing books. You've written 60 books, haven't you? Well, you have written a new one. You just sent it to me. It's called *It Ain't Over Till It's Over*, and there's a story behind that title. In fact, it came from Yogi Berra. There'll be a lot of people listening to us who don't know who he was. Why don't you to tell us?

Dr. R.T. Kendall: Well, I grew up as a New York Yankee fan. I'm sorry about that if that's not yours. Joe DiMaggio was my hero, but second was Yogi Berra. When he left the Yankees, he became the manager of the New York Mets and things didn't go so well. In July of the year he took over, his team was at the bottom and people were crying out for his being fired and the owner of the Mets were going to fire him. A reporter came up to him and said, "Yogi, is it over?" He told me, he said it just rolled out, "It ain't over till it's over," and do you know? At the end of the season, they were number one and went into the world series. It gave that saying more credibility.

Five or six years ago, when I'm in my mid-seventies, I thought I want to write a book on finishing well, and I'd love to call it, "It Ain't Over Till It's Over." So I started five years ago trying to reach Yogi Berra. I'd write letters, I'd make phone calls to his museum, and I couldn't get anywhere. About two years ago, I was preaching in Montclair, New Jersey. On the way to the church, the driver just casually said, "Yogi Berra lives in this town." I said, "Really? I want to meet him." But it wasn't so simple. It took another 16 months. It's easier to get to meet the Pope than Yogi Berra, but we finally pulled it off. It's a long story, I tell about it in the preface.

Dr. Dobson: He was ill at the time that you wrote this.

Dr. R.T. Kendall: Well, he's not well, as we speak he's 90, but he was delighted to meet me for some reason. What thrilled him most is that I didn't want to publish a book with that title without his blessing. Now, legally I could have done it, but I didn't feel right about it. I told him what I wanted to write about. I sent him the manuscript and he kindly sent in a statement, and we've got it on the front cover, "I hope this book will help many people. Yogi Berra." As you know, he's a baseball Hall of Famer, greatest catcher in baseball history. On the back cover there's a picture of Yogi and me. In a few days, I'll give him his copy.

Dr. Dobson: This statement, "it ain't over till it's over," was only one of many famous quotes of his.

Dr. R.T. Kendall: He only had an eighth grade education and he would say things that weren't grammatically correct, but everybody knew what he meant. "It gets late early out here," he would say. "When you come to a fork in the road, take it." "It's deja vu all over again."

Dr. Dobson: That's his most famous quote.

Dr. R.T. Kendall: I was so honored. He actually gave me a personal tour of his museum. I may be the last person he's ever done that for. He walked around with a cane.

Dr. Dobson: Well, you have put that title on your book and you have a little different meaning for it. How does it fit in to what you wrote?

Dr. R.T. Kendall: Well, two things. First, the last part of the book is on finishing well, and it ain't over till it's over. I had a lady come up to me a couple of years ago. I think it was in Johannesburg. She said, "It is so good to meet somebody who has finished well." I looked at her and-

Dr. Dobson: I'm not finished yet.

Dr. R.T. Kendall: I tried to smile. It ain't over till it's over, but then, as I began to write the book, this phrase works for so many things. Mainly prayer, not giving up until God steps in. Jesus gave us the parable of the persistent widow who went to this unjust judge every day, asking for vengeance. Jesus said, "Look here, you should be like that in your prayer life. How much more will your heavenly father bless you?" He said, "Pray, and don't give up." That very parable of Jesus encourages anybody listening right now. I don't care what it is you're asking for, it ain't over till it's over, until God says no, consider the answer might be yes.

Dr. Dobson: Yeah. You also mean by that if your life has been a disappointment and you've messed up and you've really fallen into grievous sin.

Dr. R.T. Kendall: Yes.

Dr. Dobson: You can still find forgiveness and the Lord can still make something out of your life.

Dr. R.T. Kendall: Take King David, he sinned, he committed adultery. He committed murder to cover it up. Had he died then, he would not have finished well, but God gave him a second chance. Over the years, he restored his love for God and God blessed him and he ended well. This is an encouragement to anybody. You may say, "Well, I've messed up. It's too late for me." Wrong. It ain't over till it's over. God is the God of second chances. He will say to anybody today, "You come to me, I will take you." There's good old 1 John, 1:9. "If we confess our sins, he is faithful and just to forgive us our sins and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness." That applies to anybody listening, God says come back. It ain't over till it's over.

Dr. Dobson: I want to get you to talk, as you did in the last chapter, about finishing well. Before we get to that, though, there are a number of very practical applications of this book. It's what I love about your writings, R.T., because they're personal, they're powerful and they're very meaningful. In this case, you have written about the characteristics of God and how he works in our lives. In fact, he's often very slow. I mean, he takes his good, easy time. You can't press him. When he's ready to work in your life, he does. In the meantime, he doesn't explain. That's when I wrote *When God Doesn't Make Sense*, there are many ministers that seem to have the notion that sooner or later, this is all going to become very clear to you and the Lord's going to break in and you'll say, "Oh yeah. Now I see." Frequently you don't know. We might not even know till we get to heaven, but we do see his handiwork in our life, but it takes him time to act. Why?

Dr. R.T. Kendall: I have a theory on that. It's because God likes our company. If he answered our prayer the first day, we'd say, "Oh. Good, I've got it." He hides his face to see how much we want, what we want. Here's a principle. According to 1 John, 5:14. "Anything we ask in God's will, will be answered. If we ask according to his, will he hears us." Now that phrase, he hears us, is a Hebraic expression from the Hebrew word Shamar, to hear. It also means to obey. If God hears us in this Hebraic sense, it means he will obey our request. So if we ask anything, according to his will, he hears us.

The problem is, he doesn't always tell us he hears us. We can put a request and we think, "Lord, did you hear me?" John goes on to say, "If we know that he hears us," but that's a big if, we know we've got it, but that doesn't happen every day. We put the request, don't know if we prayed in the will of God. Here's the perfect example, Zachariah and Elizabeth prayed for a son. After several years they thought, "Well, that's a prayer that God isn't going to answer." They tore up that request and just went on with their lives. Some 25 years later, Gabriel, the angel, comes and says, "Zachariah, your prayer has been heard." He wants to say, "What prayer?"

Dr. Dobson: What prayer?

Dr. R.T. Kendall: Yeah. Well, "You and Elizabeth prayed for a son." "Oh. That prayer. Well, that was years ago. I'm an old man. Have you had a look at my wife lately? There's something that's gone wrong." The truth is, God stepped in. He heard the prayer the first day, but for reasons we can only speculate, he didn't let Zachariah know that for some 20, 25 years. Then he says your prayer has been heard. That's why I say when it comes to praying, it ain't over till it's over. Don't give up. Now, there's a second principle. Not only is every prayer prayed in the will of God going to be answered, but the shape it takes when God steps in is determined by our readiness at the time. Here's what happened. Zachariah wasn't ready. He wanted to argue back with Gabriel. Can you imagine anything more stupid than to argue with an angel? I would have thought if Gabriel said something to me I would just believe it.

Zachariah said, "There's got to be a mistake. I'm old, she's old." Then Gabriel had to say, "Zachariah, I'm sorry. I've come to give you good news, but before I go back to heaven, I have an unpleasant duty to perform. You're going to be struck dumb and not able to speak because you don't believe a word I've said." Now, the interesting thing, Jim, is that his unbelief did not abort the prayer being answered, but the shape it took was determined by Zachariah's readiness. He wasn't ready. He was struck dumb. Over the next several weeks, now Elizabeth gets pregnant. His friends come and say, "Zachariah we're so happy for you. This is wonderful. Elizabeth's going to have a baby." He goes, "Mmm. Mmm." He can't even say anything. He's humiliated. His prayer was answered, but the shape it took was determined by his readiness. He wasn't ready. So this is why I say don't give up, God may surprise you and step in.

Dr. Dobson: He usually does. His answers don't come in exactly the form we expect. I understand that there are 200 or more prophecies about Jesus coming. When he came, they missed it.

Dr. R.T. Kendall: Exactly.

Dr. Dobson: They did not understand, even though they were theologians and learned men there, and they didn't understand. The story you just described is reminiscent of Abraham and Sarah.

Dr. R.T. Kendall: Same thing.

Dr. Dobson: Isaac was the miracle child that came out of that. In terms of Elizabeth and Zachariah, John the Baptist was more so, there's a little almost a linkage and a prophetic aspect to that, isn't there?

Dr. R.T. Kendall: Well, sometimes God strategically withholds what he already knows. It happened to Daniel. In Daniel, chapter 10, Daniel fasted for three weeks. Then the angel comes and said, "Daniel, I heard you the first day." Daniel wants to say, "Well, thanks a lot for telling me now," but God hears us, but doesn't always tell us he's heard us because he likes our company. He wants us to keep

going back to him and praying. If he answered every time, we wouldn't develop fellowship with him, we wouldn't get to know him. Jim, who am I to tell you this, children spell love T-I-M-E.

Dr. Dobson: They do.

Dr. R.T. Kendall: What if God spells love T-I-M-E? How much time do you spend with him? When we get to heaven, we may have many regrets, but you will never regret spending time with God. There'll be no praying in heaven. We pray now. God so wants our company that he withholds answering our requests just so we'll come back and get to know his ways.

Dr. Dobson: I have finished a film series, and I talked about the relationship between fathers and daughters, especially. I said, there are three T's, there's time. You have to spend time with them. Secondly, you have to talk to them. Third, you have to touch them. Hug them every day. Time, talk and touch. Hey, R.T., one of the scriptures that I think is relevant to what you're saying here, that has concerned me in my own walk with the Lord. Here Job had been a godly man. He had served the Lord with a willing heart, and then all of these terrible things happen.

Then God wouldn't explain what was going on to him. In fact, Job went looking for God and he said, "I looked for him in the North country and he's not there. I look in the South and I look in the East and West, and he grew totally silent." Job's prayers bounced off the brass ceiling. If the Lord had just come and said, "Now, Job, really it's going to turn out, right, this story of yours is going to be a blessing to humanity for the rest of time." If he had just explained, "Don't panic, I know what I'm doing," but he didn't. He not only didn't explain, he wouldn't even talk to Job. Have you had times when the Lord wouldn't talk to you?

Dr. R.T. Kendall: I certainly have. In fact, there's not a child of God on the planet who hasn't experienced, it's sometimes called the midnight of the soul. It is my view that every sovereign vessel, every child of God that's been raised up for a particular purpose, God hides his face and that person has to break the betrayal barrier. Do you remember that phrase that we used-

Dr. Dobson: Yeah. When I was writing my book, you gave that to me and I wrote about it.

Dr. R.T. Kendall: Well, and you dedicated the book to me.

Dr. Dobson: To you.

Dr. R.T. Kendall: Then later, let me write the forward to the new edition. Here's the thing. Every person, for example, Hebrews chapter 11, these great men, women of faith, they all had in common that they broke the betrayal barrier. They all hit a wall and asked "Lord, how could this happen?" Those who broke through and broke the betrayal barrier, found out how real God is. They were so glad they didn't give up. At the end of Job, the key verse in chapter 42, Job says, "Now I know no

purpose of yours can be thwarted." All's well, that ends well. It's the same principle. It isn't over till it's over, and at the end, you'll be so glad you didn't give up. Don't give up trusting God, don't give up on your prayer life.

Dr. Dobson: Even though in the 11th chapter of Hebrews we see the stories of people who were slaughtered. They were sawn asunder. They went through terrible misery. In the end there it says they died not having seen the good news.

Dr. R.T. Kendall: That's the amazing thing. The secular atheist would say, "Are they crazy? Why didn't they give up?" There was something in them that said, like Job, "Though he slay me, yet will I trust him." I'm not going to give up, and those didn't and they were so glad they didn't give up.

Dr. Dobson: I've had a kind of a personal theory, a hypothesis. I'm not a theologian, so I'll run this by you. I think there's another reason why God does not immediately answer all our prayers, because if the human family could get everything you want and need by just asking for it and it immediately happened, then everyone would have a reason to follow Christ for personal gain.

Dr. R.T. Kendall: Yeah.

Dr. Dobson: They would take away the reason for faith. You wouldn't need faith if you just say, "Lord, my business is in trouble, fix it," and if he would fix it, or my wife is sick, if he did everything we asked, then it would completely change. Is that an accurate assessment?

Dr. R.T. Kendall: You're exactly right. Listen, Mary and Martha sent word to Jesus and said, "Our brother that you love is sick." They thought Jesus would stop what he was doing and come straight to Bethany and heal Lazarus. He shows up four days after the funeral and they start saying, "Lord, if you'd been here, our brother wouldn't have died." Behind the scenes-

Dr. Dobson: They were a little irritated there.

Dr. R.T. Kendall: They were blaming him.

Dr. Dobson: Yeah.

Dr. R.T. Kendall: John 11:15. It's a key verse. "I'm glad for your sakes," he's saying to his disciples, "That I didn't go and heal Lazarus, in order that you might believe." In other words ...

Dr. Dobson: Not getting answers to your prayers [crosstalk 00:21:31] will make you believe.

Dr. R.T. Kendall: Yeah. Oh. Yeah. You will not grow in faith if I just come and do everything. They couldn't understand it. So Jesus shows up and says, "There was a purpose in all this. I could have stopped Lazarus from dying, but what if I rose him from the

dead, isn't that a better idea?" He showed in the end that's what he was up to. Whenever God says no, Jim, it's because he's got a better idea than what we asked for. What Mary and Martha asked for Jesus said no to, so that down the road, they could just raise Lazarus from the dead. Better than keeping him from dying.

- Dr. Dobson: That's beautiful. Shirley and I have a theologian friend, who many years ago spoke on a phrase that we quoted this week, over something similar to what we're talking about today. That quote was, "With God, even when nothing is happening, something is happening."
- Dr. R.T. Kendall: Good. Yeah.
- Dr. Dobson: Isn't that good?
- Dr. R.T. Kendall: Yeah.
- Dr. Dobson: Don't give up on it. It ain't over till it's over.
- Dr. R.T. Kendall: Yeah. An old song I used to sing when I was a Nazarene years ago, back in Ashland, Kentucky, "Back of the clouds, the sun is always shining."
- Dr. Dobson: Well, this is a book primarily of hope, isn't it? It's a book saying, don't get discouraged with your faith. God is there even when he doesn't feel like he's there. Even when he might not even talk to you, and if it takes him years, 25 years in Zachariah's case, to answer a prayer, or in Abraham, how many years was that before he was given the promise of the child?
- Dr. R.T. Kendall: Well, he was 100, and Sarah was 90 when Isaac was born.
- Dr. Dobson: Is it in the Book of Romans when he says he-
- Dr. R.T. Kendall: Yes.
- Dr. Dobson: Did not despair?
- Dr. R.T. Kendall: Yeah, didn't give up, though half dead. He was fully persuaded that what God promised he would bring to fulfillment.
- Dr. Dobson: He would do. Yeah.
- Dr. R.T. Kendall: What God wants to do is increase our faith. He doesn't increase our faith by answering our prayer every day, everything we ask for, but to let us wait and watch and not give up. When God steps in, that's when he pleases us. When we wait, that's when we please him, and it's an opportunity to please God by not complaining and not giving up, because it ain't over till it's over.

Dr. Dobson: Till it's over. R.T., we are out of time, but we still haven't even gotten to the major theme that I wanted to talk about, which is finishing strong. Let's go right on, you have flown here from Nashville, and we'll let people hear what we're about to talk about next time.

Dr. R.T. Kendall: Okay. Thank you for having me.

Roger Marsh: A wonderful reminder to continually rely on God's faithfulness, especially in our prayer lives. Dr. Dobson always says we can always trust God, even when we can't track him. That's the kind of wisdom and hope we want you to take away from this interview today. God is an ever-present help and our solid rock. By the way, you can learn more about Dr. Kendall's book, *It Ain't Over Till It's Over*, when you go to today's broadcast page at drjamesdobson.org. Once you're there, you'll also connect with his ministry and see what other resources Dr. Kendall has to offer. That's drjamesdobson.org, and then click onto the broadcast page. Be sure to tune in again next time for the conclusion of this conversation. Until then, I'm Roger Marsh. Thanks for listening to Family Talk, have a blessed day.

Announcer: This has been a presentation of the Dr. James Dobson Family Institute.

Dr. Dobson: This is James Dobson again, as we close today's program I just want to thank so many of you out there who make this broadcast possible with your contributions. I want to tell you how much your generosity is appreciated.